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EDITORIAL

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This issue of the Journal offers you an assortment of articles dealing with a wide spectrum of issues which are relevant to the black community and the Black Church. At the base of all of them is the pressing concern for a church and theology that can explain the predicament of being christian and oppressed at the same time as well as empowering the community to rise from the ashheaps to the glory of being children of God.

Bonganjalo Goba's article grapples successfully with the issues which continue to torment African christians and theologians – our christian identity as well as that of our theology. Closely related to it is that which is introduced by Gwinyai Muzorewa, namely African Christology. Those of our readers who have been following theological debates on the African continent will recall that the debate between African and Black Christology is not yet over. It is continuing. It should be easy to notice an encouraging sign in this debate – amidst all the differences, a few agreements have been reached. Gwinyai Muzorewa continues this discussion in search for more commonalities.

Mosala's article addresses the priority of the historical materialist and hermeneutical approach to the study of the Bible. This approach is used here specially in connection with the gender and cultural struggles for liberation.

This issue of the Journal being devoted to African theology and African struggles for liberation, it is appropriate that the father of African Theology in South Africa should be contributing. We refer to Gabriel Setiloane's article on "Civil Authority – from the Perspective of African Theology".

If this issue of the Journal does nothing else, it should at least underline the importance of the specificity of the oppression of Africans and therefore of the specifically African struggle for liberation. In particular it should draw attention to the religious forms of that struggle and its place in the life of theological thought and of the church. Now more than ever the place of the African in the liberation process needs to be addressed with a certain kind of deliberateness.

Simon Maimela and Itumeleng Mosala.

The Implications of the text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*

Dr Itumeleng J Mosala

Introduction

A word about the definition of terms is appropriate at the outset. There exists a great deal of confusion concerning what exactly is meant by Liberation Theology. In part, the confusion relates to the use of terms. There is also a conceptual misunderstanding in this confusion. Furthermore, it is not being extreme to suspect a fair deal of ideological distortion. That is, a deliberate misunderstanding that seeks to make a mockery of or to obscure things.

As far as terminology goes, the confusion is of two forms. There is the failure to distinguish between Liberation Theology and Theology of Liberation. Liberation Theology refers to the Latin American form of the Theology of Liberation. It is associated with the names of activist scholars such as Segundo, Gutierrez, Assmann, Bonino, etc. By contrast, the term Theology of Liberation is generic and denotes a movement of Third World people involved in a struggle to break the chains of cul-tural-religious imperialism that help to perpetuate their political and economic exploitation.

The second form of the terminological confusion involves a discourse imperialism of a certain kind. At first sight, there may seem to be no distinction between this form of terminological confusion and the first. There is here a tendency to refer to all Third World theologies of the poor and oppressed peoples as Liberation Theologies, thus subsuming them under the Latin American version of the Theology of Liberation. This mistake is made mostly, though by no means exclusively, by white radical people who identify culturally more with the European descendants of Latin America than with Third World people. Cornel West raises the question of the political implication of this cultural preference of the political left when he writes:

For oppressed coloured (black) people the central problem is not only repressive capitalist regimes, but also oppressive

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European civilizing attitudes. And even Marxists who reject oppressive capitalist regimes often display oppressive European civilizing attitudes toward coloured peoples. In this sense, such Marxists, though rightly critical of capitalism, remain captives of the worst of European culture.[1]

Secondly, I resolved that on this occasion a simple apology for the Theology of Liberation would be grossly inappropriate. This is so not only because this theology has been in existence for so long that it is now an inescapable reality, but also because so many significant strides have already been made in developing it. In the case of South Africa, black theologians have been at work for more than a decade now wrestling with many issues of the nature, the method, the specific form, the epistemology, the sources and the goals of the Black Theology of Liberation. More recently, the question of the Black Feminist Theology of liberation has emerged as a high priority on the agenda of Black Theology.

For the reason, therefore, of wanting to get on with the business of *doing* Black Theology as opposed to simply *apologising* for it, as well as for the reason of giving priority to a Black Feminist theological discourse, I chose to address the following topic:

The Implications of the text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa

1. *Reading the Bible in South Africa*

That the Bible is a thoroughly political document is eloquently attested to by its role in the Apartheid system in South Africa. No other political or ideological system in the modern world that I know of derives itself so directly from the Bible as the ideology of Apartheid. The superiority of white people over black people, for example, is premised on the divine privileging of the Israelites over the Canaanites in the conquest texts of the Old Testament.

For this reason, in South Africa, all manner of theological sophistry has been produced by way of countering this embarrassing use of the Bible. The dominant opposition discourse against this way of using the Bible has been the liberal humanist one. The key characteristic of this oppositional perspective has not been its fundamental disapproval of the conquest texts of the Old Testament. Rather, this model concurs with the conservative model in its approval of the conquest texts, but disagrees with the likes of Apartheid ideologues' interpretation of them.

Thus in effect a biblical hermeneutics of textual or authorial collusion/collaboration rather than one of struggle or revolt dominated the debate concerning the reading of the Bible. Increasingly, therefore, biblical appropriation in South Africa became alienating to Blacks as their reality constantly contradicted their supposed inclusion in the biblically based love of God.

Consequently, the struggles of the 1960s which led to the exile, imprisonment and banishment of many Blacks and their organisations, notwithstanding God's love for them witnessed to in the Bible, produced a crisis in black people's self-insertion in the story of the Bible. The rise of Black Theology, which like its counterpart – Liberation Theology – in Latin America, grounded itself in the liberation stories of the Bible, signified black people's discursive attempt to deal with this crisis. This new reading of the Bible by black people themselves in the light of the struggle for liberation would attempt

to argue that liberation and not conquest or oppression was the key message of the Bible.

Black Theology and Liberation Theology's biblical hermeneutics was a product of a crisis situation and not of a revolt on the part of the readers. In South Africa it was not until the post – 1976 period when black people seem to have looked death in the face and come to terms with it in their struggle against the forces of Apartheid that a revolutionary reading practice became possible. This practice is an integral part of the social insurgency of the black masses and a necessity of the organic location of its subjects in the context of that insurgency.

The new and developing biblical hermeneutics of liberation differs from the liberal humanist tradition in that it represents a theoretical and not simply a moral mutation from ruling class hermeneutics. Such new reading of the Bible, particularly in the context of South Africa, would concur with Terry Eagleton when he says in support of what in literary criticism has come to be known as the "Revolt of the Reader" movement:

That readers should be forcibly subjected to textual authority is disturbing enough; that they should be insultingly invited to hug their chains, merge into empathetic harmony with their oppressors to the point where they befuddledly cease to recognize whether they are subject or object, worker, boss, or product is surely the ultimate opium.[2]

A study of Esther's relevance for African women's liberation struggle will need to take into account the tradition of the revolt of the reader that is becoming part of Black Theology's liberation praxis. Not only will this hermeneutics refuse to submit to the chains imposed on it by the biblical exegetes of Apartheid or those of the liberal humanist tradition including its black and liberation theology versions, but it will contend against the "regimes of truth" (Cornel West: *The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual*, 1985:120) of these traditions as they manifest themselves in the text of the Bible itself.

2. *The Biblical Scholarship of Esther*

Most studies of the book of Esther are preoccupied with questions of the religiosity, canonical status, historicity and purpose. The problem with these studies is not that they address themselves to these questions but that they rely heavily on the text itself not only for information but also for the theoretical frameworks with which the texts must be interpreted. Thus most works simply retell the story, assess the obvious irreligiosity of the text and confirm the book's own confession of its purpose.

Traditional scholarship does, however, raise crucial issues which a biblical hermeneutics of liberation cannot ignore. Norman Gottwald, for instance, addresses the question of the plot of the story, "replete with dramatic reversals"[3] which is important to note in order to understand the rhetorical devices employed by the dominant ideology of the text. It is also crucial to observe with scholars concerning the historicity of the book that:

The archaic placement of the story in the Persian court is accomplished with considerable knowledge of its inner workings and customs, but there are so many historical inaccuracies and improbabilities that the work cannot be taken at face value. The story may draw on memories of conflicts over Persian policies toward the Jews in which the Jews serving in the imperial court were involved, but the actual setting of the narrator is in the Maccabean-Hasmonean era. This is indicated by several lines

of evidence: the intensity and bitterness of the Jewish-Gentile conflicts in the book which are pictured as "fights to the finish", the lack of external references to the book until late Hellenistic times, and the very late appearance of Purim as a recognized Jewish festival.[4]

Historical Critical scholarship provides these insights which cannot be ignored by newer exegetical ad hermeneutical methods. It must be noted, however, that traditional scholarship consistently fails to draw the ideological implications of its historical and literary studies. This it does because it is often in ideological collusion with the text. A criticism that sets itself the task of serving the cause of human liberation must overcome this limitation. For as Terry Eagleton rightly argues:

The task of criticism... is not to situate itself within the same space as the text, allowing it to speak or completing what it necessarily leaves unsaid. On the contrary, its function is to install itself in the very incompleteness of the work in order to *theorise* it – to explain the ideological necessity of those 'not-saids' which constitute the very principle of its identity. Its object is the unconsciousness of the work – that of which it is not, and cannot be, aware.[5]

3. *African Women's Struggle for Liberation*

The hermeneutical weapons of struggle of African women must of necessity issue out of the specificity of their praxis within what Cornel West calls the process of "critical negation, wise preservation, and insurgent transformation of (the) black lineage which protects the earth and projects a better world".[6]

In the South African situation black women's struggle takes at once the form of a gender, national, and class struggle. The oppression and exploitation of black women operates at all those levels. What is more, these dimensions of African women's struggle span different historical periods and social systems each of which has inflected this struggle in particular ways.

Contemporary African women are products of pre-capitalist semi-feudal, colonial, and settler-colonial monopoly capitalist racist social systems, on the one hand, as well as of heroic anti-sexist, anti-colonial anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles in South Africa, on the other hand. At different times and in different ways aspects of these processes and struggles enjoyed dominance or subservience in determining who African women are and how they would wage their struggle.

Thus given this complex nature of African women's struggle a biblical hermeneutics arising out of such a struggle can hardly be simplistic. It is rather akin to the programme that Cornel West suggests for revolutionary black intellectuals. He writes:

The new 'regime of truth' to be pioneered by black thinkers is neither a hermetic discourse (or set of discourses), which safeguards mediocre black intellectual production, nor the latest fashion of black writing, which is often motivated by the desire to parade for the white bourgeois intellectual establishment. Rather it is inseparable from the emergence of new cultural forms which prefigure (and point toward) a post-Western civilization.[7]

A hermeneutics of liberation which is envisaged for an African women's struggle will be at once a human, African and feminist hermeneutics of liberation; it will be polemical in the sense of being critical of the history, the devices, the culture, the ideologies and agendas of both the text and itself; it will be appropriative of the resources and victories inscribed in the

biblical text as well as its own contemporary text; it will be projective in that its task is performed in the service of a transformed and liberated social order.[8]

4. Reading the Text of Esther

4.1 A Feudal-Tributary Text

The social formation implied by the text of Esther is clearly a kind of feudal or tributary system. Chapter 1 describes the social and political topography in the Persian Empire which patently presupposes the tributary mode of production; a hierarchical political structure with the monarch – *melek* – at the head of the royal ruling class, followed by the chiefs and governors (*sarim*) still within the ruling nobility (vss.1-3); then follows the non-royal ruling class fractions, some of whom may be properly designated middle class, the influential sector – probably by virtue of its property ownership – advisers and people of high office (*gedolim, hakamim* and *yoshbim,* vss.5,13-14). The Queen (*malkah*) is of course a member of the royal nobility, but even in a fairly straightforward descriptive text like chapter 1 her insertion into the ruling class is gender-structured (vss.10-11) where mention of her necessitates the royal summoning of seven eunuchs, the latter symbolising the private property character of the sexuality of the king's wife. In fact, the fundamental problematic of this chapter as indeed of the whole text of Esther is the *gender structuring of politics.*

The feudal social relations of the Persian Empire as articulated in this text reflect two forms of oppression and exploitation. The one form is present by its absence; it is represented by the "not-said" of the text. This form of oppression is signified in the verses of chapter 1 that describe the use to which the surplus production of the economy was put. In typical feudal and tributary fashion, surplus was squandered on non-productive luxury goods and a luxurious life-style among the ruling classes. None of it was invested in productive activities or technologies in order to enable development to take place. More importantly, verses 5-9 which describe this wasteful expenditure of the economic products simultaneously functions to obscure the social relations of production on which this consumptionist practice is premised. It mystifies the fact that behind these luxurious goods and this extravaganza lie exploited, oppressed and dispossessed peasants, serfs, and sub-classes. This text, which is otherwise excellent in its provision of socio-economic data, is eloquent by its silence on the conditions and struggles of the non-kings, non-office holders, non-chiefs, non-governors and non-queens in the Persian empire.

The second form of oppression is patriarchy. This specific kind of oppression is an inherent part of the structure of feudal society. The central thrust of the book begins, in chapter 1, around the question of the anti-patriarchal revolt of Queen Vashti. The text's agenda is spun around the view, generated by the text itself and representing its dominant ideology, that the audacity of one woman unleashed the political possibilities reflected approvingly in the rest of the book. All this, however, is located in and refracted through a feudal social structural arrangement, producing a thoroughly feudal text.

African women who are themselves products and victims of past feudal legacies and are presently historical subjects in the context of transformed

but pervasive tributary/feudal prac-
tices surviving under capitalism,
understand the specificity of this form
of oppression. Further, they recognise
that this oppression cannot simply be
subsumed under other kinds of oppres-
sion such as capitalist or colonial
oppression. For this reason the revolt
of Queen Vashti represent a form of
struggle with which an African bibli-
cal feminist hermeneutic of liberation
must identify. It does not accept the
implicit condemnation of Vashti by
the text, and eschews the technique
whereby her revolt is used as reason
for the rise of an apparently more
acceptable queen. This identification
is possible only on the basis of a bibli-
cal hermeneutics of struggle.

4.2 A Survival Text

The book of Esther builds its story
around the memory of very difficult,
times under colonial exile. The
specific lesson it seeks to draw atten-
tion to revolves around the struggle for
survival. In particular, two forms of
survival are accented in this story: cul-
tural and national survival. Needless
to say that these two types of survival
are inseparable, though not identical.

The material conditions of the prac-
tice of survival presupposed by the
text are political powerlessness,
economic exploitation, cultural and
national alienation. The text proposes
its own solution. It suggests a pure sur-
vival strategy, which is not underpin-
ned by any liberative political ideol-
ogy. According to this solution Esther
gets incorporated into the feudal
haven of the King, Mordecai is
appointed an administrator in the col-
onial political machinery and later an
even higher honour is given him.
Through the cooperation of these two
figures the rest of the oppressed Jewish

community manage to survive the
odds against them, and in fact find
themselves in a position where they
outpace the Persians at their own
game.

The price that the oppressed pay for
this favourable turn of events for them
is at least two-fold. Firstly, the oppres-
sed must be seen to have bought heav-
ily into the dominant ideology in order
that their survival struggle should find
approval. In chapter 9 this ideological
capitulation is expressed in three terse
but powerful repetitious statements:
vs.10 "However, there was no loot-
ing"; vs.15 "But again, they did no
looting"; vs.16 "But they did no loot-
ing". This principle of upholding the
sanctity of property over the life of
people is well known as part of ruling-
class ideology. The final chapter of the
book of Esther exposes the politics of
this ideology when it summarises the
thrust of its discourse:

King Xerxes imposed forced labour on the
people of the coastal regions of his empire
as well as on those of the interior. ... Mor-
decai the Jew was second in rank only to
King Xerxes himself. He was honoured and
well-liked by his fellow-Jews. He worked
for the good of his people and for the sec-
urity of all their descendants. (1,3)

Secondly, in this book the survival
of the group is achieved first and
foremost by the alienation of Esther's
gender-power and its integration into
the patriarchal structures of
feudalism.

4.3 A Patriarchal Text

More than being a feudal and survival
discourse, the book of Esther is a pat-
riarchal text. There are at least three
objections that a biblical hermeneutics
of liberation must raise against it.
These three are related to each other
and to the questions raised in relation

to the text's feudal and survival character.

Firstly, the text's choice of a female character to achieve what are basically patriarchal ends is objectionable. The fact that the story is woven around Esther does not make her the heroine. The hero of the story is Mordecai who needless to say gives nothing of himself for what he gets. Esther struggles, but Mordecai reaps the fruit of the struggle. African women who work within liberation movements and other groups will be very familiar with these kinds of dynamics. A truly liberative biblical hermeneutics will struggle against this tendency.

Secondly, the book of Esther sacrifices gender struggles to national struggles. In the name of the struggle for the national survival of the Jewish people it disprivileges the question of gender oppression and exploitation. The matter of the subsumption of some struggles under others is a serious issue of discourse imperialism. In the book of Esther this problem is especially unacceptable given the purely nationalist character of the national struggle. The Maccabean-Hasmonean revolution which probably underlies the nationalist struggle of the text of Esther is known to have replaced Greek Hellenism with Jewish Hellenism.

Thirdly, the discourse of Esther suppresses class issues, including the class character of cultural practices. The feast of Purim, for example, which represents the principal cultural benefit of the Esther revolution, is not located in class terms in such a way that proper ideological choices can be made about it. In this it is very much like many cultural practices that seem inherently autocratic in the demands they place on their people.

5. *Conclusion*

This essay has tried to take seriously Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's critique of what she calls the biblical hermeneutics of consent.[9] In taking this critique seriously it has argued for the need for cultural-materialist biblical hermeneutics of struggle. Such a hermeneutics will raise questions of the material, ideological and cultural conditions of production of the text. It is argued here that it is only when such questions are raised that the political issues affecting nations, women, races, age groups, and classes will receive proper treatment in the interpretation of the Bible.

The conviction that has been articulated elsewhere must be reiterated here, namely, that oppressed communities must liberate the Bible so that the Bible can liberate them. An oppressed Bible oppresses and a liberated Bible liberates.

Bibliography
1. Cornel West, "The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual," *Cultural Critique*, Vol.7, (Fall 1985) p 256.
2. Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain* (London: Verso, 1986) p 102.
3. Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) p 561.
4. Ibid, p 562.
5. Terry Eagleton.
6. Cornel West, "The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual," p 124.
7. Ibid, p 122.
8. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin*.
9. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p 43ff.

Civil Authority – from the Perspective of African Theology

Gabriel M. Setiloane

This treatment has been long overdue. For the greatest taunt that African Theology has had levelled against it by her sister theologies – Black Theology and Liberation Theology – has been that it seems to ignore the sin of oppression, poverty and structural violence (Apartheid) perpetrated on God's people (M. Buthelezi, D. Tutu etc.) and is concerned rather more with questions of culture and Africanness than those of justice in public life – areas in which Africans at home and in the diaspora have suffered most. Acknowledging this charge, on behalf of African Theology, I have pointed out that that does not mean that there is not inside it a concern for these issues, but that for the immediate past African Theology has been preoccupied with dialoguing its way into acceptance as a legitimate way of doing theology in the face of the arrogant resistance of Western Theologies and their proponents. I pointed out then that when African Theology reaches the stage of theologising in that area, the outcome will make the preoccupations of the other theologies appear like a Sunday school picnic.[1]

This essay seeks to address the question of Civil Authority from an African theological perspective. In an essay on "Salvation and the Secular – From an African Perspective" (Mosala and Tlhagale, *The Unquestionable Right to be Free* 1986) I do what I am reputed for criticizing Black Theology and Liberation Theology for doing, i.e take the Western concept of civil authority for granted and not question its existence and raison d'être. I propose that in order to make its point African Theology will have to begin at this fundamental level. Thereafter it will be necessary to assess its human expectations from civil authority. For far too often, especially in many African countries these "principalities and powers" have sought the allegiance, loyalty and slavish obedience of people without seeing themselves as contracted to fulfil reciprocal obligations. This is the case especially in South Africa where civil authority will claim even divine ordination to rule over people whom it denies the right of consent to be ruled by it. Finally we shall attempt to draw out what would be African Theology's understanding of what civil authority should be about.

As African Theology has always claimed not to be a theology of books for some elite academics, but a verbalization of the religious experience and

1. *African Theology en Route.*

feelings of the African people, we shall attempt to show that Africans' attitudes to civil authority are indeed deepseated and emanate out of their African cultural background. This does not necessarily mean to say they are not "Christian". On the contrary I hope we shall be able again to show that these genuinely deepseated African cultural in-sights do not only corroborate Christian teaching at its best, but immensely illuminate the biblical basis out of which it draws its life. An often ignored reason behind the easy acceptance of Christianity as a way of life on African soil lies in the fact that its message was first heard as a confirmation of the values and principles of *Botho-Ubuntu* taught, aspired to and striven for in the traditional African world-view:

"For they did have a strong sense of moral equity concerning the behaviour of man as he lived with others. It is this sense of moral equity they drew from when they condemned the evil they saw among themselves by declaring of the perpetrators: "Ga se Motho" (he is no man!) i.e. he is a beast, a savage. ... What the missionaries stood for corroborated with what was best in their hopes and desires, with their silent and unuttered search and aspirations after human perfection."[2]

The Rulers of African Traditional Societies

When the white people arrived in Africa, they found African people living in groups bound together by lineage and language and a common origin. These groups they called "tribes". At the head of each groups administering its laws, customs and usages, speaking and dealing on their behalf was one whom they called *Inkosi* (Nguni)-*Morena* (Sotho-Tswana).

The whites refused to use the term "king" for this leader, as doing so would equate him with their own "kings" back home. They called him "chief". As most of the first contracts were on a military basis, "chief" developed a nuance in meaning that has degenerated it to a military ruler — "Kaptein", and the impression that it was attained by superiority in military prowess. Some of the serious blunders that were made, therefore, in some of the treaties signed with the blacks were made with the rulers — *Amakosi* — *Marena* — who may at that time have been militarily superior, but were in fact not so in the traditional view and primogenital ceremonies of the people concerned. The case in point is that of Ndlambe and Ngqika in the Zuurveld.[3]

African rulers derived their authority from their seniority of birth. As Casalis points out —

"the right of primogeniture involves great responsibilities... Thus Reuben, in the plains of Dothar, felt himself responsible for the life of Joseph, and was troubled at the thought of the disagreeable position in which he was placed by the disappearance of the lad."[4]

In a tribal group the ruling family would under normal circumstances be directly descended from the founder of the group by whose name the whole group would be known, e.g. Kwena (BaKwena), Rolong (BaRolong). Family seniority in the group would also be determined by lineal proximity to the original source. So the whole group, tribe or village would, either in fact or

2.   G.M. Setiloane, *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana*, A.A. Balkema, Rotterdam, (1976), pp 138f.
3.   See. E.V. Tisane, *Nxele and Ntsikana*, M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, (1987).
4.   E. Casalis, *The Basutos*, James Nisbet, London, (1865), p 180.

fictitiously be able to trace some sanguinary relationship with this source of origin. Indeed there would be later appendages resulting from conquest and others who would have sought and found asylum. The allegiance of such would be understood as not only to the physical power but also to the source out of which that power came, viz: the ancestors of the group as their real owners – *Beng*. Naturally, because of incompatibility and internal feuds, fision also occurred. Often it occurred at the very source, in the ruling family. For whatever reason it might have been so, the law of primogeniture continued to hold sway thus affecting the position of the (tribal) groups on the ladder of seniority. Therefore among the Tswana the seniority of the Hurutshe group over others, Ngwaketse, Kwena, Kgatla, etc. etc. is accepted and acknowledged in ritual to the extent that a MoHurutshe commoner would be granted prior place even to royalty in a first fruit ritual performed in another group among whom he lives or sojourns.[5]

This law of primogeniture extends beyond the realm of the living into that of the ancestors. Every family has a long line of ancestors it traces itself from and to whom it owes gratitude for protection and sustenance. Collectively all these ancestors sustain and uphold the total group. In that role the ancestors of the royal household are considered exactly in the same order of importance as they were while they were alive and themselves headed the group. The ruling head, therefore, derives his powers and rights not only out of primogeniture but from his ancestors who are not only his but also the ancestors and protectors of the whole group. For instance, H. Rider Haggard was right to make the legitimacy of the headship of the group to be judged and finally decided by the verdict of the ancestors, in spite of the fact that Umbopa already bore the indisputable sign of "tribal" headship (*King Solomon's Mines*). So the ruler (*Morena-Inkosi*) does not rule of himself, nor does he do so only because he is born to do so; but he does it as a Vice Regent on behalf of his ancestors who have ruled before. Therefore a Tswana ruler would never refer to his subjects as "My people" but rather as "The people of my fathers" or call them by the name of the original founder of the group, e.g. "BaKwena", the people of Kwena. The crucible, therefore, of the morality and righteousness of his actions as a ruler is whether they would be passed by his ancestors. Therefore W.C. Willoughby tells the story of a Tswana chief who under pressure from his courtiers to act in an obviously prejudiced manner against another, retorted: "I cannot do that! How shall I face my fathers if I did so?"[6]

In a similar manner the respect, honour, loyalty and allegiance that an African ruler received from his subjects were/are not offered to him as a person alone but as representative of his forebears.*) In this way he becomes the prototype of the group, and is respectfully addressed as such e.g. "*MoKwena*", "*MoKgatla*", "*MoRolong*". He is Number One! The more he, in his conduct of public affairs, shows respect and adherance to their (i.e. the ancestors') ways – *mekgwa* – *amasiko* – and traditions, the more and closer the people will be drawn to him. For as he does so, ensuring a good relationship with his ancestors and

5.   See R. Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, (1842), passim.
6.   W.C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, SCM, London, (1928), p 390.

conducting himself and public affairs as they did and would, he ensures the prosperity and wellbeing of all. The early missionaries often described African rulers as unimpressive people with mediocre physical appearance and lacking in personality. Nevertheless these leaders commanded the respect, loyalty and allegiance of their people. For it was not in their physical appearance and achievements that their premiership lay and was displayed. Although they impressed strangers "with a low opinion of their intellect", their countenances exhibiting "so much mediocrity and mental indocility that one would not take them for a chief unless appraised of it"[7] theirs was a vital role in the ritual life of the group. Every year at spring they presided over the Seed-Cleansing-Ritual; in autumn they headed the First-Fruit Festival and in winter the Harvest. So also their sons and bullocks annually went first to initiation and circumcision. Above all when disaster and tragedy like drought or plague struck, they were the intercessors who in ritual appealed to "The Owners of the Land" – the fathers departed – for *Lotsididi* – cooler times, a respite. That is why, especially in the more climatically arid parts, the western highveld, mainly Sotho-Tswana-country, rain-making was a coveted propensity of the monarch.

"None but the paramount chief could preside over this ritual ... he, being the senior surviving representative of the line, is the natural priest of his fathers, who are the tutelary deities of the tribe....

Varied as these rain-rites are..., it can scarcely be denied that they were designed as a ritual of intercession with the spirits of the old chiefs, the tutelary gods of the tribe.

Hence the surviving successor of any given line of chiefs, who was born to share their divine prestige, is the only possible officiant. For as much as the rites are intricate and ... would be ineffectual unless performed with meticulous conformity to rule, the chief is assisted by his expert hierologist, and often by his uncles, in his dramatic invocation of the favour of his fathers upon his liegemen, herds, fields, pastures and woodlands; but *he is the pontiff, and they are the acolytes.*"[8]

The Role of Women in Ritual

Perhaps this is the point at which mention needs to be made about the role of the women members of the royal household. For while it is true that the ancestors repose their authority on the "Monarch", their insight, wisdom and even power are not restricted to him alone. His immediate relations, uncles, brothers, sisters and aunts share this authority with him. They may not necessarily and always do so in the public place like the *Kgotla* where the various clan heads gather, if they are women; but they certainly do have a unique place in ritual. For instance as J. and E. Krige have brought it to public notice in *The Realm of the Rain Queen* (194?) among the Vhaluvedu the monarchy is divided as it were. The matter-of-fact-administration and conduct of affairs is done by the heir who is in fact monarch and ruler. But where it concerns ritual, affecting the whole group's wellbeing, the seasonal festival etc., his mother, the widow of the deceased father and predecessor, acts; especially in rain-making, First-Fruits festivals and Seed Cleansing. Therefore the Krige's title. She is the ceremonial head who links the living community with the deceased ancestral community. While

7. John Cameron, in Archives of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London.
8. W.C. Willoughby, *Op cit*,. p 204 and 214.

this is not so very obvious among the other peoples, it is still there.*) Among the Tswana an old paternal aunt to the Monarch joins the Monarch and his elderly uncles as they pray for rain calling upon their fathers (royal ancestors) to intercede on their behalf. *Medimo e menyenyane re rapelleng go Mogolo* – "Little divinities pray on our behalf to the great Divinity". With the customary privilege that daughters enjoy with their fathers while alive, such a great aunt might even take the liberty of addressing the departed royal ancestors, father, grandfather and grand uncles, by name, this way intensifying the communities' appeal and examplifying her greater proximity and intimacy to them.[9]

It must not be forgotten also that the beer, that is always available at the *Kgotla* where men are met, and which is so very important in the invocation of the ancestors, in normal intercouse there and particularly in the reception of strangers and visitors, is brewed by or under the direction of the women of *Kgosing* – the royal household –, i.e. they prepare the sacred drink, sacred because it is shared with the ancestors. By an old Sotho-Tswana custom the most ceremonially senior woman in the Monarch's household, his mother or wife, was responsible for the fire at the *Kgotla*. That fire was called *Mollo wa Badimo* – the Fire of the Ancestors – and was never allowed to die out. If it did, she was responsible for rekindling it. This she would do before dawn, because normally the Kotla was "out of bounds" – taboo – for her as a woman during the normal times of its activity. When the siting of the village was changed – as happened ever so often during *difaqane* – it was this senior woman's responsibility to carry the

embers of the fire from the foresaken *Kgotla* to the new one and with these to rekindle the fire there. Whatever the case her's was the responsibility to kindle the first fire in the new site. It is from this central fire place that the senior women in the various clans comprising the group (tribe) would take the light to kindle their household fires.

The purpose of this diversion is to make two points, viz:

a) That authority was shared inside the family, each member having his/her part to play even before it was exercised on the *hoi poloi*. It was not a privilege or favour bestowed by the royal ancestors on one person. Indeed it cohered and rested ultimately in the ancestors.

b) That women shared in the favour and privilege bestowed by the ancestors and played a very important ritual ceremonial part in addressing them on behalf of the group. So also down the strata of the community, the clan, the household, and the family (*lapa*), women shared in the exercise of authority. Indeed their role was prescribed; but then everybody's role, even that of the ruler – *Morena-Inkosi* – was strictly prescribed by tradition, enfored by the invisible powers, the ancestors, and he strayed out of the set rules of behaviour at risk to his status and position.

WHEN "PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS" REBELLED

From the foregoing it is clear that African Traditional Society would be highly conservative. Roles in the community were determined by tradition and enforced by the Divinity, through

9. G.M. Setiloane, *Op cit.*, pp 75f.

the ancestors who were the guardians of morality and equity at various levels of the community,[10]. Departure from tradition would therefore be understood as acting contrary to the precepts of the ancestors, and for one in authority it would be tantamount to sedition in high places. African "principalities and powers" are, like the Old Testament Kings and Judges assessed good or bad, successful or not to the extent that they do and live by what is considered "just and righteous" in the sight of the Divinity, in this case the ancestors. Departure from traditional usage which might offend the ancestors and thus bring about disaster to the total group by way of drought, pestilence etc. is punishable even by the tribal tribunal. For as Monica Wilson takes pains to mention, drawing from different sources, both among the Sotho-Tswana (Schapera) as among the Nguni (Kuper), a chief "was traditionally below the law and could be tried and fined by his own counsellors" who would then be the executors of Divine authority. Such a ruler, who abrogated traditional usage, setting himself above the common good and acting capriciously, lost respect and authority and was described as *Morena wa meKopu* – a king of pumpkins.[12]

African history, oral and written, especially in Southern Africa is replete with examples of how civil authority that went off the path was treated. Certainly loss of loyalty and allegiance of "the people of his fathers" was the first thing. For allegiance and loyalty to a power which is itself disloyal to the higher authority of divinity through the ancestors is blasphemy and idolatry, i.e. like worship at wrong shrines. Secession would be the next step. By seceding or running off to set themselves up under the leadership of some other person of an even lesser status – some uncle or younger brother – away from the decadent ruler would be a peaceful way of solving the problem. The secessionists would plead departure from tradition and the will of the ancestors as good reason, and see themselves as the defenders of truth and right: The case of Ndlambe and Ngqika in the Eastern Cape in the last century is in point. Among the BaTswana about the same time a young ruler misguided by his *Kgotla* ordered the annual ceremonial castration of the yearling bullocks before the harvest had been brought in. The normal sequence is that the harvest be brought in first. The castrated bullocks can then feed on the grain stalk in the fields without the strain of travelling too far, and thus heal quickly. The courtiers could not convince their *Morena* that he was doing wrong in so departing from tradition and therefore inviting the wrath of the ancestors on the whole group. Late one night these councillors and other disgrunteld families taking with them the *Morena's* sister who was mother to a suckling boy called Moeng, secretly leaving the main community with their cattle and household effects to set themselves up as a new tribal or clan group under the leadership (Morena-ship) of this woman, *MmaThari*. To this day this incident is celebrated in the oral praise songs of this clan of BaRolong people. Peter Delius describes a similar action by ManKhurwane and a section seced-

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10. *Ibid.,* p 65.
11. M. Wilson, et al, *Oxford History of South Africa*, OUP, vol.1, Cambridge Press, (1968), pp 122 and 158.
12. E. Casalis, *Op cit*.

ing from his brother SeKhukuni under the influence of the missionary (1986). In this case the religious element in the motive was even more patent because it was Christianity that was the bone of contention.

The teaching here is that conscientious followers of tradition found themselves constrained to withhold their love, loyalty and allegiance from a civil authority which was handling affairs contrary to the will of the ancestors. Such an authority was deemd "rebellious to higher powers" and its actions could only be followed by disaster for all.

A famous case is that of Sechele, *Kgosi/Morena* of BaKwena under the pastoral activity of George McKenzie of the LMS at Molepolole in the last century. Sechele, having been converted Christian and living under missionary influence, would not conduct the annual communal ritual of "rain-making". In tradition "rain-making" is the monarch's responsibility to ensure the goodwill and beneficence of the ancestors and the survival and prosperity of the group. By so refusing to perform this ritual and others because they were to him now "heathen", Sechele was rebellious as a monarch to the directions and will of the ancestors. Thus left in the lurch, his people settled for second best. They treated Sechele as if he had ceased to be their ruler or had died, and persuaded his brother Kgosidintsi to perform the ritual. As he was in the direct line of primogeniture it was proper to do so. Sechele remained their "ruler" in every other way but not in ritual. But as Kgosidintsi performed the communal rituals, interceding on behalf of the people with the ancestors, their loyalty, trust and allegiance shifted

from Sechele to him. For instance ritual services after the hunt or harvest, and even straight devotion and respect as *Morena*, Vice-Regent of the ancestors, wered directed to Kgosidintsi. Sechele realised his mistake and loss of control. He was becoming a "pumpkin ruler" – *Morena wa Mekopu*. He repented and began again to perform ritual and rain-making. As he did so, the people returned their loyalty, love and allegiance to him, recognised him again as their king.*) This again examplifies the Sotho-Tswana expression: *Morena ke Morena ka Batho* – "A king is one only when and as long as he is acknowledged by the people". Therefore it is clear that African people acknowledge a civil authority only in as far and as long as it is prepared to be the channel of the blessings of divinity to the community. The divine right of kings, so-called, then becomes an onerous burden on the ruler. It is not, as often some think, only and absolute privilege. As Casalis observed – "The right of primogeniture involves great responsibilities among the natives". Precisely because of his mystical involvement with all his people, *Morena* is not above the law. He discharges his responsibilities while fully aware of the two authorities by whom he may be checked – his *Kgotla*–council of elders and his *Badimo*–ancestors who are at the same time *Badimo* of his whole people:

"It is not unusual to hear a chief say, in objecting to some course of action that is proposed to him: 'How will I meet my father (or grandfather) if I do that?' Such a phrase presupposes an unpleasant experience in the spirit world for one who has wasted his patrimony, broken up his tribe or sacrificed the domain that his ancestors won."[13]

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13. W.C. Willoughby, *Op cit.*, p 390.

The heart of the matter here is that there is for the *Morena-Inkosi* no cause for personal and individual self-sufficiency and pride even in achievement because all would be understood as a gift of *Badimo* who although his direct physical forebears are not his alone, but his for the total community.

THE VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF AUTHORITY

The case of Tshaka and his brothers Dingane and Mpande who decided to assissinate him has left them as the villains of African history. Unlike Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, but like Judas of the New Testament their case has lacked advocates and sheer greed – heathen pagan greed – and ambition have been seen as their motive. The other and more African view could be that Tshaka had ceased to be a channel that transmitted divinity and its blessings to the community. The killing of Noliwe, his betrothed, for the attainment of physical power and the inhumanity and the cruelty which he brought his mother's retinue put him beyond the pale of *Ubuntu* – Ga se motho! Also the havoc his cruelty had caused all over the subcontinent with *difaqane* certainly could not win the approval of the ancestors, let alone their blessings. His continued reign only presaged a curse and the wrath of the ancestors on the group. Deciding to assassinate him could therefore be seen as an act of service to the community not unlike shooting a rabid dog.

What we are saying is that in the traditional African view a civil authority which by its actions has ceased to transmit the blessings of divinity to the community, but persecutes, exploits and terrorises, thereby forfeits its authority and is expendable even by

violence. Put in another way, a civil authority is not sacrosant but owes its right of existence and homage from its subjects only to the extent to which and as long as it continues to be the servant (minister) of divinity to the community. Very appropriate here therefore the British royalty's household motto propounded at the peak of the glory of British monarchy and imperialism viz: "Ich dien – I serve." The civil authority is understood to be a servant of the community, in biblical language "a minister" to the people.

CIVIL AUTHORITY AND PERSONAL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

Post-colonial independent Africa has become the laughing stock of the world because of the extent to which its new civil authorities, "principalities and powers" have proved insensitive to human liberties and rights. Often many self-respecting Africans have had to hang their heads, dumbfounded and their nationalist price quenched by shame. Our enemies have of course made capital of this and inhuman systems and regimes like South Africa's apartheid policies have won support on world platforms and courts because it has become feared that, left to themselves, Africans cannot bring into being nor manage institutions of government which would uphold personal liberties and rights. The "tyrannous" rulers of African history, especially Tshaka and Mzilikazi, misrepresented and misinterpreted by prejudiced imperialist historians and observers, have been cited to indicate how contrary it is to the nature of Africans to be fair in public dealing, sage in council and considerate in judgement of people as persons. A study and knowledge of African religious values and concepts con-

cerning the human person and the community would, however, strongly argue against this. Common everyday expressions indicate a sensitivity that should lead to kindness, humaneness and tenderness which would make for greater respect for human rights and liberties. Examples for this are: *Motho ke Modimo* – "A human person is divine", and – *Molato wa khutsana o lowa ke ditshoswane* – "The cause of the defenceless orphan is contested by ants", meaning what has been said above, that in all human intercourse the ancestral unseen *divinity* is a silent observer and ultimate judge and executor.

Actually early observers of African public affairs, before the threat of insecurity and adulteration by other cultures (the very Western cultures which today claim superiority) witness to societies and communities in which these values and concepts were practised and upheld by the civil authorities. "Records of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries among the Xhosa and Mpondo, and the eighteenth century in Natal, ... depict a society in which disputes were settled in court, trade regulated and the power of the chief bridled ..."

Van der Kemp, the first missionary to the Nguni, reported in 1800, of the Xhosa Chief Ngqika:

"He has his counsellors who inform him of the sentiments of his people, and his captains admonish him with great freedom and fidelity, when he abuses his authority to such a degree that there is reason to fear that the nation will shew him their displeasure. This is done, if he treats the admonition with contempt ... most effectually by gradual emigration."[14]

Casalis reports that Tshaka and his successor Dingane were not the norm but historical freaks (like Hitler and Napoleon). He calls them "the tyrants of Natal ... who exacted almost divine homage. Those who approached them were obliged to crawl into their presence with adverted heads ... These servile habits were entirely without precedent in this part of Africa, and the country was deluged with blood in order to establish them. Nothing like this is ever found among the Bechuanas ... There everyone approaches the most powerful chiefs without the least ceremony. No one dreams of rising in their presence, either as a mark of respect or to give them a more comfortable seat when they enter unexpectedly a circle already formed. They are interrupted and contradicted without ceremony, and are merely addressed by their names, pompous titles being reserved for State occasions."[15]

Moffat confirms that primogeniture, the divine sanction of the ruler's position as *Morena* (authority) did not necessarily limit the freedom of speech, censure or even the freedom of action of the members of the group who were under his authority against the authority:

"The government of these people partakes both of the monarchial and partriarchal, comparatively mild in character. Each tribe has its chief or king, who commonly resides in the largest town and is held sacred from his hereditary right to that office. A tribe generally includes a number of towns or villages, each having its distinct head, under whom there are a number of subordinate chiefs. These constitute the aristocracy of the nation, and all acknowledge the supremacy of the principal one. His power, though very great, and in some instances despotic, is nevertheless controlled by the minor chiefs, who in their *pichos*

14. M. Wilson and L. Thompson, *Oxford History of South Africa*, OUP, vol.1.
15. E. Casalis, *Op cit.*, p 219.

or pitshos, their parliament, or public meetings, use the greatest plainness of speech in exposing what they consider culpable or lax in his government. An able speaker will sometimes turn the scale even against the king, if we may call him such. I have heard him inveighed against for making women his senators and his wife prime minister, while the audience were requested to look at his body, and see if he were not getting too corpulent; a sure indication that his mind was little exercised in anxieties about the welfare of his people. ... the national council (Pitso) (was and still is) the stronghold or shield of the native customs, in which speakers have, in a masterly style, inveighed against any aggression on their ancient ceremonies, threatening confiscation and death to those who would arraign the wisdom of their forefathers. This was their forum, while the responses on nobles were the pulse of the nation."[16]

Just to what extent free critical speech was exercised at the *Pitso* against the *Morena* is examplified by this record of the proceedings of one vital *Pitso*. The occasion was the discovery of the MaNthatisi warriors, about to attack the BaTlhaping's principal village. The speaker, one Taisho, was one of the subjects of King Mothibi of BaThlaping:

"Turning to the king, he said: 'You are too indifferent about the concerns of your people; you are rolled up in apathy; you are now called upon to show that you are a king and a man'."[17]

Nor was this freedom of speech and expression restricted as "Parliamentary privilege" to the precincts of the *Pitso* ground which Moffat rightly describes as "their parliament". Casalis in his *Etudes de la Langue du Bechuana* records how even a highly respected and loved monarch like Moshoeshoe had sharp and incisive

criticism levelled against his decision concerning the use of *his own property* by a poor warrior:

"Moshesh had given a few cattle to a very courageous officer. And then he wanted to take these cattle back in order to send them to Leshwe, chief of Bathlaping ... The officer was extremely angry and presented himself in front of Moshesh with these words:

"Is this the way a just man should behave? You take from me all my food, all the subsistence of my wife and children in order to send it to foreigners. Have you not other cattle to give him? Must you leave those to whom you owe your salvation living in misery? Look at my body, it is covered with wounds. I fought against MaNthatisi, the Zulus and the Korana. If the enemy comes again will you see Moshesh expose himself to the assegais? No! He will not dare to follow me. It is I who is going to fight, suffer hunger, thirst and fatigue, while my chief will eat, drink and sleep peacefully."[18]

WHO SPEAKS THE WORD OF CORRECTION?

African traditional community life in the interaction between the people and their civil authority seems not to have a set-up that would identify a single person who would stand out as the spokes-person on behalf of divinity – i.e. a prophet, an Amos or a Nathan. In comparison with biblical Israel, African traditional society seems to be at the pre-prophetic period where the priest suffices (besides the king!) as the interpreter of divine will and purpose. In this context this role would be filled by the *Ngaka ya Morafe*, the official doctor of the community/group, who could be the specialist, always available to advise as to the details in the conduct of

16. R. Moffat, *Op cit.,* pp 248ff.
17. *Ibid.,* p 352.
18. E. Casalis, *Etudes de Langne du Bechuana,* Royal Press, Paris, [1843], p 16.

affairs and especially rites.[19] The king is the priest-patriarch, except that he is not an autocrat. The *Kgotla*, Elders' Council, is not only his board of executors or ministers of state, but also his check. It is out of this group which is composed of "the aristocracy of the nation" that despotic tendencies are checked in the name of tradition and appeal to the authority of the ancestors for the good of all.

Guardianship of the morality and advocacy for the cause of the helpless and deprived who are seen as *Batho ba Modimo* – the people of *Modimo* (in a specially deeper sense than all the others) was not left to select people. As in the case of the warrior who challenged Moshoeshoe (above) they themselves enjoyed straight and unrestricted access to the seat of power, there to "use the greatest plainness of speech in exposing what they consider culpable or lax in his government" or conduct as head of the group. So the situation is that the community itself through the persons (individuals) who compose the various levels and in different capacities exercised spokesmanship towards equity and righteousness in society in the name of divinity. It is true that knowledge about the workings of divinity – *Modimo* – through the ancestors was deposited on or acquired by the *Ngaka* more than anybody else, even the King himself. However, revelation or inspired insight into things was the prerogative of all, royal, noble and common folk, men and women. In this way it would seem aggression and evil in public affairs would be curbed before it had grown to inordinate proportions.

It needs to be said though, that age gave an even greater freedom of speech and authenticity as speaking on behalf of the divinity. A word of warning or censure from a grey-haired, bodily feeble, wise old man uttered with a trembling voice at the *Kgotla* or informally, was greatly heeded by the wielders of power. It had resonances of the words of their fathers now gone and living in the realm of *Badimo*, those he had consorted with in youth and manhood, and whom he expected to claim him soon to join their company in the land of *Badimo*. Who could speak for divinity with more authority even if less ostentation!

APROPOS THE CURRENT THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

Before entering the area of pointing out what I would call the perspective of African Theology as regards civil authority and its dealings, it seems appropriate to make clear what I believe lies behind the hermeneutic of African Theology. African Theology maintains that theology is a verbalization of an existential (subjective?) experience of divinity. Naturally different people have different experiences of the same divinity – (for "Behold, O Israel, the Lord thy God is One!"). Each group of peoples interprets or understands divinity and its workings at any one time, out of its aggregate historical experience of life and the view thereof, A *Weltanschauung*. So although we may stand in a common Christian solidarity of confession, each group nevertheless has its own understanding and view, therefore its own interpretation of that which we together commonly confess. This uniqueness of each group's confession (called theology) is based on and to a great extent is moulded by its historical experience called culture. In Afri-

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19. G.M. Setiloane, *Op cit.*, p 76.

can theology, we Africans encounter the materials of the Christian faith (the Bible and teachings of the church) with our whole history from the beginning of time and of existence, and how it has schooled us to comprehend, appropriate and live with reality. I suppose this is what is meant by culture! Without denying others their own expression according to the path we each have travelled from time immemorial to the point at which we have all converged at the cross on Calvary's hill, we stubbornly declare that our experience, dedication and comprehension are clear, real, could educate others too, and certainly deserve a place in the record of the various unique existential confessions of this reality in universal experience. Our African traditional practice and/or religion, therefore, becomes our path to the universal revelation of divinity through the man of Nazareth and his cross on Calvary. In other words our hermeneutic key then is our traditional historical existential experience of divinity in community from the beginning of time. What representatives of other cultural groups have had difficulty in accepting is this stubborness in claiming the uniqueness of our understanding of this reality when they claim to have been the tutors who brought us to the foot of the cross. Perhaps we should refer them to Paul's words in the Epistle to the Galatians, viz. that a child who is the heir is totally under the direction of the tutor, but when it has attained adulthood it might even instruct its erstwhile tutor (Gal. 4:1 ff.)

WHAT THEN IS AFRICAN THEOLOGY'S PERSPECTIVE OF CIVIL AUTHORITY?

1. That *Morena – Inkosi* is what he/ she is through the working of divinity and that not just anybody can take his/ her place and head the group, seems to be fully in line with Romans 13, that "the powers are ordained by God". The African traditional view, and therefore African Theology, would enthusiastically echo Peter when he states the purpose of being of these powers: "for the good ordering of society", i.e. life together. Our historical traditional life shows this all the way in the prescriptions it sets for the responsibility of the civil authority – e.g. conducting ritual for the transmission of the graces and beneficence of divinity to the people. In fact in its view of the whole sphere of society being an arena of the divinity's activity (i.e. no sacred-secular dichotomy) the African traditional concept bears witness to the fact that it considers that all civil authority is under the charge – and that means for good or evil, for blessings and for judgements – of divinity.

2. That the civil authority exists for the people in the community to subject themselves to it (i.e. to be obeyed) is without question. The African traditional situation would even say that wilful and persistent disregard of civil power as Vice Regent of divinity would be seen as apostasy against divinity and therefore punishable. That is why treason is such a serious offence, punishable even with death.

3. However, African Theology, drawing from African traditional practice would never view any civil authority as absolute. All rights and powers of such an authority are vested in the divinity, and the authority is under its judgement. "How shall I meet my fathers...?"

4. When the civil authority ceases to be the transmitter of the graces and benefits of Divinity, i.e. execute what

has been entrusted to it, it forfeits its validity. The case of Sechele when he stopped performing the rituals which were vital for the group's life points to this.

5. Such a forfeiture of validity means an extrication of the people from its authority and rule. Should it, however, persist to exert itself as authority, then it becomes the "'abomination of desolation' ... standing in the holy place" (Matthew 24:15), a hindrance to the people's access to divinity, viewing itself as the final point of reference, and as such expendable. Here we come to the belaboured question of uprising against or violent resistance to the civil authority. African Theology would, therefore, stand by this and perhaps even advocate it as an act of faith, thus reminding us of Islam's teaching on the "*Jihad*".

Throughout my life and career in ecumenical discourse and across debate the African continent (and elsewhere) I have never once come across an African Christian theologian who would forswear the validity or legitimacy of violence against a reprobate civil authority. Many of us have shied from open advocacy of violence because of the logistics of it. Men of God, however, like Bishop Lowun of Uganda during the Idi Amin regime, and some Nigerians during their tragic civil war, have not resisted condemning aggression by the civil authority even to the point of martyrdom. Canon Burgess Carr as the spokesperson of African Christian religiosity verbalized it, *ex cathedra* in his capacity as General Secretary of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) at its Third Assembly in Lusaka 1974:

If for no other reason, we must give our unequivocal support to the Liberation Movements, because they have helped the Church to rediscover a new and radical appreciation of the cross. In accepting the violence of the cross, God, in Jesus Christ, sanctified violence into a redemptive instrument for bringing into being a fuller human life.[20]

In the *Book of Revelation* there is exhibited a strong revulsion, similar to that of African traditional practice, against a civil authority which usurps the role of divinity in determining the fate of people. It is seen as "the Beast", the "AntiChrist". It is true that the *Book of Revelation* does not explicitly advocate the destruction of the "AntiChrist" by its victims. It, however, sees it deposed and destroyed by God's might. African traditional practice would support the former option! For, in its understanding, divinity always acts out its purposes through people. We have pointed out also how in African traditional practice the word or act of censure and judgement (prophecy) is spoken and acted out by even the commoner. Hence the "ant" in the proverb *Molato wa khutsana o lowa ke ditshoswane* (see above) could be the downtrodden victim of systemic aggression and misgovernment.

I have argued in this paper and elsewhere that when any people become Christian they willy-nilly and even unconsciously bring with them into their Christian understanding values, insights and perceptions inherited from their pre-Christian past. The world has reacted rather judgementally to the frequency and multiplicity of coups d'état in Africa since the departure of the colonialists. Perhaps the world should stop and look and listen. Is it not still the African's traditional, very religious understanding

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20. See Report of the All Africa Conference of Churches: "The Engagement of Lusaka" in *The Struggle Continues*, p 78.

that actuates the dramatis personae in this drama; That a civil authority that has ceased to transmit the beneficence of life from God on whose behalf it acts as an authority, loses validity? I once heard a Zulu lay person declare in a church conference that the South African white regime, as far as he was concerned, had lost its *Isithunzi* = its essence of being and had therefore become, as it were, a wraith, an empty shell. When once such a conclusion has been reached and, mark you! after very long and deep religious reflection, is not the obedient devotee called upon, in the name of God and in preservation of its integrity, to "rise up and strike"? It is logical. To my understanding of African Theology – "To falter would be sin".

A Quest for an African Christology

by Dr. Gwinyai Muzorewa

Christology is a major aspect of African theology, yet not much has been written specifically on the subject. One of the very early statements on Christology was made by John Mbiti back in 1972: "Some African Concepts of Christology" in *Christ and the Younger Churches* (edited by G.F. Viddedom). Another statement on the subject was made by John Pobee in his book *Toward An African Theology* (1979). Most recently a whole book *Christ Our Ancestor* (1985) by Charles Nyamiti has appeared on the subject. Father Charles Nyamiti has written fascinating creative work using the basic African traditional religious ancestral concept to formulate a Christology. I believe it is fair to say that the concept of ancestors is as popular among traditional Africans south of the Sahara, as is the name of Jesus Christ in the Church in Africa.

Because of the importance of Christology for the Church in Africa today, where Christian Church membership is growing like wildfire, it deserves one more review to which I now invite the reader in order to bring the subject into theological and dialogical focus. Let us devote our time to a discussion on Charles Nyamiti's quest for a Christology.

CHARLES NYAMITI'S QUEST FOR AN AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

The quest for an African Christology is one of the most important concerns in African theology today. The need for a relevant theology is urgent because the Church is growing faster than the development of African theology. Furthermore, African theologians are taking indigenous theology very seriously. Father Charles Nyamiti has accomplished a monumental task as the author of *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (1984, Mambo Press) which is an attempt to develop an indigenous Christology. I believe that Nyamiti's study is very crucial on the subject of Christology because Africa has accepted Christ as their incarnational saviour.

In his remarks in the preface, Nyamiti tells us that "Theological enquiry revealed that not only African ancestors who died in the state of friendship with God but all the saints in heaven and purgatory can be regarded as our true Christian ancestors... if the deceased Africans and the saints are true Christian ancestors they are so only in virtue of their participation in Christ's unique Ancestorship."[7] Thus for Nyamiti, ancestorship is not confined to those Africans who died in a good relationship with God, but to all the saints. In fact, the author defines 'ancestor' as: "a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is mediator to God, archetype of behaviour, and with

whom – thanks to his super-natural status acquired through death – he is entitled to have regular sacred communication." (p 24) African Christians have to prepare themselves to accept this spiritual link as the basis of their belief that Christ is their ancestor who will provide all their needs, even surpassing what the traditional ancestors would do.

The discussion on the Incarnation is intended to establish that since Christ is the Father's son and we are also the Father's children, therefore Christ is our brother; and since he is dead and raised from the dead, Christ has become our brother-ancestor who will also redeem us from death. That Christ is God-human makes him the "archetype of our supernature and Christian conduct." (p 35) Nyamiti notes that "all the essential elements of his ancestorship were fundamentally present in Him already at the moment of His conception" since he was born precisely to serve a particular purpose. (p 36) Thus Christ was not just another human being in spite of the traditional orthodox teaching that he was truly human and truly divine at once. Even when he was still in the womb of the Virgin Mary "he was endowed with the fullness. of the divine Spirit, although He could communicate Him fully only after His exaltation." (p 36)

Through several images, Nyamiti attempts to develop a Christological perspective based on one's understanding of the African spirituality and kinship. If one can comprehend what one's ancestors mean to him or her, then one can also understand what Christ as our brother-ancestor means in our lives. Nyamiti's Christology begins and ends with the ancestral thought-form. Our understanding of the spiritual and the historical dimensions of ancestral dealings more or less

defines our conceptualization of Nyamiti's Christology. Indeed, his Christology is best understood as an expression of African spirituality.

Ancestrology is the frame of this Christology. For instance, as our African ancestors heal, serve as prophets and pastoral advisors, and as priests so does Christ – except He excels them! Nyamiti takes advantage of the similarities between the African ancestral functions and Christ's pastoral and redemptive functions to draw conclusions that demonstrate how much more the latter can do for us. Then he also uses the dissimilarities and divergencies between the two to prove how superior "the redeemer shines forth as THE Brother-Ancestor par excellence, of whom the African ancestors are but faint and poor images." (p 70)

The conclusion Nyamiti builds toward is that the African concept of the ancestor is a true "*praeparatio evangelica*" for the Christian doctrine on Christ as the unique ancestor of mankind, and that "His ancestorship is the highest accomplishment of its African counterpart." (p 70)

By becoming man the Logos became our brother-ancestor, thus in principle redeeming the rest of humanity through the Incarnation and the Easter events which bridged the God-humanity gap. This is not new to us. The humanity of Jesus has always been a decisive factor in any Christological debate. In fact, it is the most exciting element in the doctrine. For instance, Nyamiti shares with the Greek Fathers the view that Christ saved humanity because of his own human nature which represented the human race and made reconciliation between God and humanity not only possible but efficacious as well. However Nyamiti stresses that his starting point is

human solidarity, whereas the Greek Fathers put emphasis on *human nature*. The difference between the two is both conceptual and philosophical, and therefore it is crucial. It marks an important distinction between traditional Christology and that of Nyamiti, which is based on the understanding of ancestrology.

Nyamiti and Traditional Christology

In his quest for a Christology, Nyamiti believes that the Brother-Ancestor model which he uses is only one among several possibilities but it is the most indigenous thought-form. He contends that this model is a much better method to interpret Christian revelation. Although there may be some similarities between traditional Christology and the brother-ancestor Christological model, there is no doubt in Nyamiti's mind that the latter is influenced to some extent by the former; yet it warrants its own station in the theological arena. For instance, both Christologies can be characterized as "Christology from above."

That Christ is our brother-ancestor has been established in part on the basis of our knowledge of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Chalcedonian formula from which traditional Christology draws heavily. Nyamiti discusses the attributes of his Christology in the light of what traditional Christology says about Christ's "three offices." He believes that the fact that African theology shares insights with the traditional classical Christology is a positive sign of a healthy dialogue. However there are clear differences between Nyamiti's Christology and the classical orthodox Christological views passed down through the tradition of the church. Let us examine these for a moment.

Nyamiti observes that since the middle ages classical Christological discussions have always dealt with the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption separately. In his judgment, classical theological thinking on *both* the two natures of Christ, and Christ's sacrifice and vicarious suffering was basically speculative without much interest in the pastoral relevance of such a Christology.

Nyamiti's approach is different from the classical approach in that the former begins with an African understanding of brother-ancestor spirituality. As he proceeds, he does not treat the Incarnation separately from Christ's work of Redemption. His approach requires a unity between the subject of the Incarnation and that of Redemption thereby developing a Christology that is relevant to our African life of faith.

Furthermore, Nyamiti claims that his approach leads to accentuation of various Christological themes which are quite different from the themes stressed in traditional Christology. Among the fifteen themes he lists, Nyamiti has included certain ones which are quite new in Christology, making his contribution special. However, none of these should be taken in isolation. For example, the claim that Christ is our brother-ancestor and that we are his descendants, creates a new ingredient in the concept of Christology, but it is to be understood.

Nyamiti also stretches the ancestor model so far as to argue that there could be a sense in which God is our ancestor. Traditional Christology has not even entertained this perspective, let alone developed or utilized it as a model to interpret theology. Yet if Jesus Christ and the Father are one, and the Son is our brother-ancestor, it necessarily follows that God the

Father is our great ancestor. Although Nyamiti does not develop this, he proceeds to compare his Christology with the contemporary Christologies in order to demonstrate how his reading might be helpful in the contemporary discourse.

Nyamiti and Contemporary Christologies

Nyamiti puts his theology to test against contemporary Christologies in order to establish the difference between his own and others. In contemporary theology, Christology seems to occupy a significant place, hence our interest in the subject here. Nyamiti gives a summary of the major features of the present day Christologies in order to properly juxtapose these with his own. For example, he discusses a historical approach to Christological discourse, including the "Christology from below" vis-à-vis "Christology from above" points of departure that have influenced many modern theologians.

The second feature in contemporary Christological discussion is what Nyamiti calls "pastoral concern." Recently theology has become perhaps more meaningful and relevant because, more and more, members of a community are doing theology dealing with the social context of their own people. A side effect of this phenomenon is that a plurality of Christologies, most of which are not clearly articulated, has mushroomed especially in the Third World. Worthy of mention is the liberation theology, which is being done by members of the oppressed groups themselves. Such theology is most likely to be a "a theology from below" – based on the activities and the message of the historical Jesus. Nyamiti remarks that some of these theologies have turned out to be secu-

lar or political Christologies, which is desirable because it means Christ is understood as acting at the every day level of existence.

Nyamiti notes that current theology has its limitations along with its strengths. For example, the historical approach has opened possibilities for what Nyamiti calls "theological disbalance," and the opportunity for falsification of the Christian message, to mention only two drawbacks.

Nyamiti's Christology differs from most contemporary theologies whose point of departure is historical, because his is a "Christology from above." In this approach he joins hands with such major Protestant theological authorities like Karl Barth. Because Christ's ancestorship must start from the mysteries of the Incarnation, Redemption and the Trinity, Nyamiti's brother-ancestor model necessarily makes his "a Christology from above."

Yet Nyamiti further argues that "this African Christology cannot be purely ontological." (p 80) Nyamiti's Christology of brother-ancestorship must also necessarily combine the "above" and the "below" point of departure. He says his Christology "is bound to be both ontological and functional." (p 80)

Clearly, Nyamiti's method makes his Christology different from the classical understanding in its approach, and different from contemporary Christologies because he combines both the "ontological" and the "functional." Also, the way he treats the Trinity, the Incarnation and Redemption makes his Christology unique because he discusses all three as ingredients of divine spirituality.

Nyamiti's Christology is appealing to the African traditional religious thought because of the firm belief that God who once withdrew to the heavens

has returned in Christ. So the coming of Jesus Christ is an event the African anticipated. Therefore, an African Christology from above fits well their indigenous thought-forms. Furthermore, rather than confining themselves to the Jesus of history, the African is attracted more by the Jesus Christ who was crucified, dead and buried, but also was raised as their brother-ancestor. This is where Nyamiti's Christological model suits the African religious *modus operandi*. Death becomes an important aspect in an African brother-ancestor Christology because of the African concept of spiritual life beyond the grave; whereas classical Christology would value the element of death only insofar as it is a true human being who experiences real death.

Here again we have a case where both the death (historical) and the resurrection (supernatural) bring added richness to our Christological perception of the classical and contemporary Christologies, including that of Nyamiti. Indeed, the brother-ancestor Christology is deeply African in its character, concept and spirituality. It is this concreteness in African spirituality which draws many to Christ because life beyond the grave is such a reality that it is worth pursuing.

Critique of Nyamiti's Christology

Undoubtedly Nyamiti has made an excellent attempt to synthesize Christology and ancestrology. However, there are some parts that lack clarity. For instance, when he says on page 7 that "... not only African ancestors who died in the state of friendship with God but all the saints in heaven and purgatory can be regarded as our true Christian ancestors" does Nyamiti classify those Africans who never confessed Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour as Christian? Does he classify famous God-fearers like Abraham, Moses and a whole host of prophets as Christians of some kind? It is not clear whether all God-fearing people are to be regarded as Christians as such. On the one hand one ordinarily regards as Christian those who are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, another way to look at what Nyamiti is doing is to think in terms of the pre-existent Christ who has always been with God in a spiritual state. In light of this perspective, it can be intelligibly argued that those God-fearers who had a good relationship with God automatically related to the pre-existent Christ who is part of the Godhead. In this sense, we may call them Christian insofar as they had a good relationship with Christ in God. However, we need to bear in mind that it is Christ in God who took the initiative to reach for them.

In a real way then, this perspective would serve to explain in part this author's quest for what Christ was doing in the time between the Creation and the Incarnation. We have stated elsewhere in this section on Christology that Christ must have been involved in the creation (history) since the beginning of time. He has always participated in history and beyond. We cannot imagine Christ being "passive" in the heavens, while people needed the saviour as we always do. We are therefore convinced that Christ must have participated in history in a different way and form until the time of the Incarnation when the Word became flesh.

Another point which Nyamiti makes that is not clear deals with humanity's filial link with Christ. He argues that this link is made possible

"through habitual grace alone" (p 24). It seems to me that this is a weak link as far as ancestrology is concerned. Here Nyamiti appears to experience difficulty in establishing how Christ is our actual blood brother, a condition required in order that he may be our actual ancestor.

Of course, it is not easy to establish a blood-link since we generally regard any God-Human relationship as mystical and spiritual, not physical. Maybe we would simplify the matter by basing our relationship with Christ as the level of humanity, rather than of divinity (which Nyamiti alludes to when he refers to habitual grace alone). Personally, I would be contented to hear that my relationship with Christ is based on our common humanity which is created by God our common creator and parent. This would make more sense to me especially if Christ is conceived of as the incarnate word. The true humanity of Jesus Christ which makes him one of us would also make him our blood brother. Blood relation is extremely precious for us Africans. This feeling of solidarity with Christ is an important element in our Christian commitment. Furthermore, establishing that our humanity shares a common parentage with Jesus Christ the Incarnate would easily make Christ, who died and was raised from the dead, our "living-dead" or our ancestor. In all this it is not difficult to relate to Christ in spirit, but Africans embrace both spirit and flesh and so it is important to establish a meaningful relationship both spiritually and physically because Christ is viewed holistically in the African philosophy of life.

Nyamiti's explanation may present some readers with problems because it confuses the example with that which the illustration is pointing to. In other words, our understanding of the

ancestors can be useful in our study of the person and nature of Jesus Christ without having to make Christ our brother-ancestor. However ancestrology is undoubtedly very useful as a model for our Christological conceptualization. But the model should not seem to replace Christ and become a form of Christology itself. What we are saying is especially important in light of the fact that here we are not creating a Christology but merely seeking ways to understand the orthodox doctrine on Christology. Therefore ancestrology simply opens a window through which we can catch a spiritual glimpse of the nature and person of Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that most Africans south of the Sahara would understand Christology much easier if the subject were to be formulated in an ancestral model. But, because Jesus Christ is our God whom we worship, one would need to distinguish between God and ancestors. Of course we have pointed out elsewhere that we do not worship ancestors. Rather, traditionalists worship God through their ancestors who are in a supernatural, spiritual state like God.

To talk of worshipping God "through" ancestors is quite different from worshipping God "through" Jesus Christ. Some Christians argue that to worship God through the ancestors is indirect but worshipping God through Jesus Christ is a "direct channel." This argument implies a limited understanding of the nature of God. When we talk to God, there is no question of direct or indirect. This question is only applicable in a finite situation. For example, when the African traditionalists present a case to the chief, they do it in an indirect way. The case is presented through the hierarchy, ascending from the bottom to the top.

Although each time the case is restated everyone can hear it, the protocol has to be observed to show respect and honor.

Therefore, when one channels one's prayers through indirect ways because that is the most humble and respectful manner in one's culture, will God not listen to that worshipper because the prayer is indirect? Of course not! The most important factor to bear in mind is that God likes those who worhsip God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), and African Christology expressed in African spirituality creates a context for true worship.

Toward a Quest for Christian Identity: A Third World Perspective

Bonganjalo Goba

INTRODUCTION

It is now common knowledge that the introduction of Christianity in the Third World by various missionary agencies was an attempt to impose Western cultural values and norms thus providing political legitimacy for all forms of Western imperialism. Theo Witvliet, the Dutch theologian makes, I believe, a pertinent observation when he writes "From the beginning, the history of mission has been entangled with the history of European expansion: conversely, from the beginning the conquest of distant lands has been associated with a strong developed sense of Christian mission."[1] This is a very critical issue, and many Christians in the Third World are still recovering from this religious trauma by reevaluating the relevance of Christianity in their different sociopolitical contexts.

Therefore any serious theological discussion about the nature of Christian identity in the Third World is bound to be problematic for reasons which will become clear in this very brief statment. As I cannot speak for the entire Third World situation, my focus will be on that part of the Third World which is Africa, with special reference to the South African situa-

tion. The perspective that I wish to raise here represents the ongoing theological commitment of those of us who are members of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, a theological forum established in 1976 to encourage theological dialogue and political solidarity amongst Third World theologians.

I want to suggest that the problem of Christian identity is part of the ongoing task of theological hermeneutics. This, for me, has to do with the critical interpretation of the Christian faith in a particular historical context with the view of establishing its validity and relevance. This hermeneutical task also involves a process whereby a new sense of identity comes to be established as a perspective that gives direction or inspires action. This hermeneutical task of establishing identity is a response to the basic tenets of the Christian faith, i.e., to the tradition (*paradosis*) which is being handed on, so to speak, to those who receive it. The reception of any religious tradition always calls for interpretation which brings new insights to the nature of religious identity. Robert J. Schreiter makes a very important observation when he writes:

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1. Theo Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun: An Introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World* (London: SCM Press, 1985), p 9

Tradition contributes three things to the development of human community. It provides resources for identity. It is a communication system providing cohesion and continuity in the community. It provides resources for incorporating innovative aspects into a community.[2]

Having made these rather general remarks about Christian identity as the ongoing task of theological hermeneutics, I want to explore very briefly how certain African and Black Theologies are addressing this problem. These efforts we see in the African and Black Theology movements. They both represent different approaches to the question of Christian identity in the African context. But they are important, as you will discover, because they are interesting examples of the process of contextualization in the African context.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICAN AND BLACK THEOLOGIES AND THEIR QUEST FOR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

1. Today when we speak about the quest for Christian identity in the African (black) context we refer to the ongoing task of African and Black Theologies in their efforts to redefine the nature of the Christian mythos[3] from an African and black perspective. I use the terms African and black because they represent two important hermeneutical movements within African theological scene. For over two decades African theologians in various parts of Africa have been preoccupied with the development of African theologies[4] in an attempt to

define for themselves their understanding of the nature of African Christian identity. These efforts have examined the relation between Christianity and African traditional religions. This process of re-interpreting the Christian mythos within the African world view has challenged African theologians to examine various aspects of Christian doctrine such as God, Christ and the mission of the church. In a paper I wrote some few years back, I defined African Christian theology as a reflective understanding of the Christian faith within the African cultural religious milieu.[5] What is implied in this definition is that serious theological reflection within the African context will have to take seriously the cultural religious context. Before Christianity came to the shores of Africa, Africans had a strong commitment to their traditional religions. These religions played a very significant role in defining who they are and the meaning of life in its totality. This is why John Mbiti makes this rather interesting comment:

Because traditional religions permeate all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and nonreligious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion.[6]

Thus African religious cosmology provides a unique context for African theological reflection. It becomes a crucial point at which African christians begin to articulate their commitment and establish an identity as followers of Jesus Christ. This process of

2.   Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis, 1985), p 105.
3.   Cf. Theodore W Jennings, Jr., *Introduction to Theology: An Invitation to Reflection upon the Christian Mythos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).
4.   Cf. Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).
5.   Cf. Bonganjalo Goba, "African Christian Theology: Toward a Tentative Methodology from a South African Perspective," *JTh SA*, no. 26 (March 1979), pp 3-12.
6.   John S Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., 1970), p 2.

theological reflection has challenged African Christians, for example, to redefine their understanding of God in favour of one which takes seriously their traditional view of God. Many current names used by African Christians for God do not reflect their traditional meaning because these were given by Western missionaries who had very little knowledge of the African religious worldview. For example, the current name for God we use in Zulu is "*Unkulunkulu*", "the greatest one," and is felt to be inadequate; yet the traditional name "Umvelinqangi" which means the one who is the beginning of everything, the source of life or to use Tillich's phrase, "the ground of our being," is hardly used within the African Christian community. But because of the emergence of African theology more African Christian communities are being challenged interpret the concept of God in the context of their traditional religious experience, this also applies to their views on the significance of Christ.

What is important in this process of contextualization, is that African Christians are motivated to confront their religious schizophrenia by reclaiming the basic tenets of Christianity in their particular context. Archbishop Tutu makes the same point when he writes:

The fact is that, until fairly recently, the African Christian has suffered from a religious schizophrenia. With part of her/himself s/he has been compelled to pay lip service to Christianity as understood, expressed and preached by the white man. But with an ever greater part of her/himself, a part s/he has been often ashamed to acknowledge openly and which s/he has struggled to repress, s/he has felt that his/her Africanness

was being violated. The white man's largely cerebral religion was hardly touching the depths of his/her African soul; s/he was being redeemed from sins s/he did not believe he had committed; s/he was being given answers, and often splendid answers, to questions s/he had not asked.[7]

I believe African theologies in different parts of Africa are beginning to address the issue of religious identity crisis by developing the kind of theological hermeneutic which takes seriously the Afrocentric view of life, and in so doing develops a new sense of Christian identity. What is also significant in this process is that African Christians are more conscious of the challenge of religious pluralism than their Western counterparts. Religious pluralism is not viewed as a problem, but as a fundamental fact of religious life. There is an open and dynamic view here, that religious identity is something innovative and creative in that it involves a critical re-evaluation of our religious convictions, especially in any context of religious pluralism. African Christian identity, in other words, evolves out of this pluralsim, in which there is a creative dialogue between contrasting and yet complementary religious worldviews. Interesting examples of this creative dialogue can be seen in many attempts by African theologians to develop relevant christologies for their churches.[8]

2. The other important contribution to this quest for Christian identity we encounter in the Black Theology movement both here in the United States and in South Africa. My own work as a theologian has been greatly influenced by this movement. Black theology is an attempt by Black Christians to reinterpret the Christian faith

7. Desmond M Tutu. "Whither African Theology?" in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, eds., Edward Fashole-Luke, Richard Gray, Adrian Hasting, and Godwin Tasie (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). p 366.
8. Cf. Sigqibo Dwane. "Christology and Liberation," *JTh SA*. No 35 (June). pp 29-37.

in the context of Black religious experience. It is a theology whose basic hermeneutic expresses the challenge of being black in a context of white institutional racism. This exciting black theological hermeneutic is a response to the challenge of black power here in the USA and black consciousness in South Africa. It is a theology whose point of departure is the experience of oppression in which there is a positive reaffirmation of our black Christian identity. This point is made also by Boesak!

It is no longer possible for black Christians to escape these pressing questions: how can one be black and Christian? What has faith in Jesus Christ to do with the struggle for black liberation?[9]

This quest for black identity in the black power movement and black consciousness movements becomes a hermeneutical key to unlocking the depth and richness of the black religious experience. It is a redefinition of black personhood, by black Christians that authenticates their faith in Jesus Christ. The reality of blackness becomes the basic expression of our obedience to the imperatives of the gospel. Therefore black theological reflection becomes the vehicle or channel through which black Christian identity is established.[10]

What we see in both these efforts to redefine the nature of Christian identity, is a commitment to take seriously the challenge of being African and black in the world. It is to give the Christian mythos a new interpretation which is rooted in our Africanness as well as our blackness.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Any identity is anchored in a particular social context or in a specific set of social relations. This point has been well developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality.*[11] That identity formation process involves a dialectical relationship between the individual and society really implies that we become who we are as a result of a particular form of socialization in which there are always competing claims of meaning and negative power relationships. These competing claims of meaning within a particular sociopolitical context lead to the development of critical consciousness. It is in this context that one begins to appreciate the political significance of the conflict of interpretations about the nature of social reality.

I believe this conflict of interpretations about the nature of social reality goes on also within religious communities as they seek to be faithful to the imperatives of the gospel. In this context claims to religious authenticity do not only necessitate conflict in a general sense, but may also lead to schism. I want to suggest for our discussion that claims to religious authenticity in many Third World Christian communities are approached in terms of (a) new forms of spirituality, (b) critical involvement in struggles for justice and peace, and (c) a new theological method.

When African theologians engage in the theological task of reclaiming the basic tenets of the Christian faith, they are rejecting the kind of colonial Chris-

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9.   Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence, A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Power* (Orbis Books, 1977), p 40.
10. Cf. Bonganjalo Goba, *An Agenda for Black Theology, Hermeneutics for Social Change* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988). In this book I try to address the problem of Christian identity from a black theological perspective.
11. Cf. Peter Berger, Thomas Lukman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchorbook, 1967).

tianity which was imposed on them. This rejection, as I have noted before, represents a projection of a new Christian identity, one which takes seriously the African holistic view of life steeped both in the cultural values and traditional religious practices of the people. It is in this context that we appreciate the exciting revitalization of the Christian faith as one which is not foreign but speaks to the very heart of the Christian community. This hermeneutic regrounding of the Christian tradition within the African world view does not only promote a new sense of African Cristian identity but becomes the *sine qua non* of the new kind of spirituality in the African context. There can be no authentic presence of the church without this new sense of African Christian identity in Africa. Theo Witvliet makes a very perceptive comment in this regard:

Anyone who reflects on how long and how fundamentally the autonomy of the African has been undermined and trampled on by systematic contempt and mockery of his/her culture and religion will recognize the inevitability of a reaction which acknowledges the value of those traditions and even glorifies them. This reaction creates the necessary self-respect which is the indispensable condition for the search for a new liberating identity.[12]

The other important contribution to this critical task of identity formation, I believe takes place in black theological reflection. It is a reaffirmation of our God-given task to challenge racist oppression on the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ. In a situation where our black identity is threatened and subjected to oppressive structures, black theological reflection becomes the basis for developing a critical con-

sciousness, one which exposes the contradictions of our society. Our blackness becomes a point of departure for theological reflection. What authenticates this kind of theological reflection is a commitment to the struggle for liberation, as we strive to dismantle the system of apartheid. We are challenged to expose contradictions in our everyday social life, as well as to discover our true black identity. For those of us who by choice are Christians, this identity is rooted in our black religious experience. There is a sense here in which our involvement in the struggle for liberation is shaped by who we are and at the same time defines who we are.

The quest for Christian identity is a dynamic process which evolves as Christians reinterpret the gospel in a particular context. It can never be a finished product but always invites another critical theological reflection. In the Third World this sense of Christian identity is forged in the struggles for cultural and religious authenticity as we have observed in Africa. It is also forged in the various struggles for liberation, especially in South Africa and many parts of the Third World. What is unique about this quest for Christian identity as part of the theological task, is that faith is validated by praxis. In other words, what is at stake here is not the challenge of orthodoxy but of orthopraxis. Dermot Lane makes a relevant point in this regard:

Linked to this praxis-centered understanding of knowledge is the presence of an equally different view of what constitutes the truth. In many traditional epistemologies, such as empiricism or critical realism, the mode of truth which is operative is one of disclosure. In the praxis-centered understanding of knowledge the

12. Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun*, p 90.

model of truth is one of transformation. Truth is perceived in the experience of social transformation.[13]

I believe this praxis-centered theological approach has interesting methodological implications for the Christian identity formation process in any given sociopolitical context. Theological reflection for me is very much connected with the Christian identity formation process which begins with the basic experience of oppression. Governed by a hermeneutic of suspicion, it unravels the contradictions in our life through a critical process of social analysis. It is in this task of social analysis as we engage in the struggle for liberation that we acquire new self-understanding. This process is sometimes referred to as conscientization. But social analysis is not sufficient to bring about this new sense of Christian identity alone; it must be accompanied by critical theological reflection, which involves a reappropriation of the basic affirmations of the Christian faith as decisive in shaping our praxis in a particular context. This praxis-centered theological approach which arises out of our commitment redefines who we are in the struggle and at the same time is based on our faith. Christian praxis offers an interesting alternative to any discussion about the quest for Christian identity. Feminist, black and Third World liberation theologies are all interesting examples of the different approaches to the notion of Christian identity and all address the problem of religious particularity and theological inquiry in a public context from the perspective of the underside of history.

13. Dermot A. Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process and Salvation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, Ltd., 1984), p 73.

Book Reviews

Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches?
Ulrich Duchrow
WCC Publications, World Council of Churches, 1987, 231 pp., $9.50.

Dr. M.P. Moila, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mapumulo

Ulrich Duchrow's book fiercely challenges the churches in rich industrial countries, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, to accept the universal challenge of the global economic system. Thus it articulates the author's strong belief that the economic problem is one of the problems facing humanity today and that it is a problem which the church of Christ cannot ignore and which should be tackled in "contextual" terms.

To achieve his objective the author clearly identifies the factors which prevent the churches in rich industrial countries from accepting this challenge, the fetters which hold up these churches captive in their Egypt, and traditional resources which could be utilized by them to free themselves from their enslavement by these fetters. Further he identifies God's concrete command in this issue of global economy, credal question to ministers of these churches, and the steps which should be taken in the global context.

The book speaks directly to the German context and indirectly to other contexts. Thus apart from articulation of warnings, it also builds on German tradition, for instance certain valuable experiences such as those of the confessing church in Nazi period. It consists of ten chapters.

In the first chapter the author spells out the distortion of the Lutheran "Two-Kingdoms" doctrine by the Neo-Lutheran tradition. In his view this doctrine has acquired enormous ideological importance in most Lutheran churches today and as such it is used as an "axiom" that the church has nothing to do with politics (p 3). For him it, thus, serves "as their basis for a double standard of morality – a Sunday morality and weekday morality" (p 13), has led the rich churches to believe that political maters are outside the scope of salvation, led to the restriction of Christianity's influence, substraction of its authority, the identification of some Lutheran churches with the dominant forces in society and the belief by some Lutheran churches that Christians are incapable of resisting political structures, because they are a very small minority in society. The author believes that this usage is contrary to Luther's original idea and intention. In his view Luther intended to point out the real tension between the divine kingdom and the forces of evil in human history and to encourage humans to become "fellow-workers" with the God whose will is that the whole of creation should have life abundantly.

In chapter 2 the author discusses the assimilation of the institutional church into the social and political institutions and interests of its social context. This church, he maintains, either seeks a privileged place in society or exists at

privileged places in the world. Utilizing Bonhoeffer's ecclesiologies, he condemns this church and concludes that the struggle of the church of Jesus Christ should be waged in the world and that the global economic system is one of the foremost places where *Christus praesens* should be today, because it is this place which is central for justice (p 26). In his view the church should be where God shares in the sufferings of the world. In chapter 3 on the basis of Luther's and Bonhoeffer's ecclesiologies he concludes that the church is summoned to resist perverted and oppressive political systems and to persuade society as a whole, by its own resistance and example, and by creating and developing just and participatory structures in order to solve humanity's vital questions (pp 60-67). In chapter 4 he challenges the church's financial system and those responsible for the European churches to listen to the voices of those who suffer from the global economic system, in regional and national meetings of the W.C.C. In his view this is the only way through which these churches could join God's liberating action for justice. He thus views the decision of the ecumenical movement to be in solidarity with the poor as a significant break-through in the history of the church (p 74), and challenges European churches to "recognise honestly their direct complicity in the structures of the global economy and draw necessary conclusions (p 81).

In chapter 5 he concludes that the struggle for justice and human dignity should begin within the church itself, because in his view at issue "is not simply a position of a better society but of a choice between Christ and Anti-Christ, between church and anti-church" (p 94). He thus challenges churches and christians, unless they are poor, to confess their sin of supporting in one way or another the global economic system. He believes that the church is destined to win the struggle for justice and human dignity, because it has received the promise that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (p 96).

In chapter 6 he concludes that for us today the question of "confessing church" is no longer just a theoretical possibility, it has become an historical "must", "which both alarms and exhilarates us" (p 113). He condemns selfstyled "Christian" groups which support oppression and intimidation (p 118) and warns that the European churches will destroy themselves, as white South Africa is destroying itself, if their relationship to the two-thirds world develop in the same way as white South Africa is developing in relationship to its black peoples (p 134). In chapter 7 he concludes that "the global economic system is a mission field for the confession church today" (p 177) and that the church must live, work, worship and struggle in concrete solidarity with the underprivileged – locally and worldwide (p 180). In his view every effort should be made "to persuade the institutions in both church and state to fulfill their God-given function of promoting and protecting life" (Ibid).

In chapter 8 he challenges churches and Christians in the rich countries to accept the forgiveness of all their sins in the new convenant in Christ's blood and justification by God's grace before they can be God's instruments of re-newing human societies and socio-economic structures. He insists that the forgiven church "at every level should thoroughly investigate the economic questions, especially in respect of the global economic system, its mechanism and possible alternatives" (p 196). For him this church "must test the institutions against scripture and the confession of faith" (p 198) and rigorously analyse "secular institutions in the light of the revealed will of God as attested in scripture and reflected

in the creeds and confessions" (Ibid). He also insists that "the nations of the world and the church must unite in the quest for alternatives for life, the life of the human family and of the whole earth" (p 200) and that the church is the fellowship of all people except those who exclude themselves (p 201). In chapter 9 he challenges Christian churches to demonstrate their solidarity with the poor of the earth by participating in the struggle for a more just economic system (p 213). In chapter 10 he insists that the strongest possible ecclesial response should be given to the challenges which confront the churches and humanity as a whole (p 218). In his view "the one church of Jesus Christ" can be "one of the strongest signs of hope, in a world in which suffering and danger multiply", only through a process of mutual commitment to justice (p 225). He, however, maintains that the reality of this commitment comes to us as a gift from the Triune God.

The book seeks to help the affluent churches of the West to recognise their mission in secular institutions and those theological resources which exist to enable them to be in solidarity with the poor in their struggle for justice and peace. It is, therefore, of utmost importance for the situation in South Africa whereby black people suffer as a result of an unjust political system.

Louise Kretzschmar: The Voice of Black Theology in South Africa
Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986. xiii + 136 pp.

S.S. Maimela, Unisa, Pretoria

Louise Kretzschmar's book, which grew out of thesis for a Master's degree, is an important contribution toward the interpretation of the significance of Black Theology for South Africa. Written by a sympathetic female white theologian, the book should go a long way toward mediating the concerns of black South African Christians to the white community. This is a task that only a white person, familiar with the literature on Black Theology, could perform. Unlike those whites, be they conservatives or liberals, who quickly dismiss Black Theology on the basis of hearsay or mischievous misrepresentation before they have read or listened to it, Kretzschmar's work is commendable since it is highly informed and the author takes pains to thoroughly document her arguments. For this reason, she speaks persuasively and with authority, as a Black South African would.

The above positive comments, notwithstanding, I must regrettably point out that it is rather unfortunate that Kretzschmar's book should trade on and is replete with male sexist language. Her lack of sensivity on sexist language is unforgivable coming as it does from a female theologian who sympathetically discusses the Black Theology of liberation. Some of us had counted on her to help conscientize her male readers about the problems concerning sexist metaphors for the divine in theological language. We pray and hope that, in the future, she will become as concerned about male sexist domination of women as she is about the white racial oppression of Blacks. That concern should be reflected in the language we use.

Furthermore, Kretzschmar has tried to cover too much in few pages. The result is that she succeeds merely in introducing important themes without developing them. In so doing, the author has rendered her work into an encyclopaedic rather

than an original and creative one. If her intension was to introduce the subject to her readers rather than sink her shaft deeply in few aspects of Black Theology in order to provide new insights then this book has perhaps achieved its limited goal. I commend it highly to all South Africans who are concerned about and wish to enter into dialogue with one another, thus overcoming the polarization that threaten to tear us apart.

Kammer III, Charles L.: Ethics and Liberation: An Introduction.
Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1988. xi + 243pp $11.95 (pbk).

S.S. Maimela, Unisa, Pretoria

Kammer's book, apart from its very perceptive introduction, is made up of eight chapters. In Chapters 1-2 the author, among others, argues that ethics is a human enterprise because to be human is to be moral. He defines the task of Christian ethics, and delineates its ethical sources. Most important sources are the Bible and the person of Jesus because they provide a norm of how God is to be understood as that reality which coaxs people into freedom and responsibility, thus creating loving and caring Christian communities.

Chapters 3-4 discuss what Kammer refers to as the Christian moralscape which informs and shapes moral questions. Among these are world-views, loyalties to self, to society and to God, as well as norms and values. Chapters 5-6 focus on the relational interdependency between the individual and the community. Kammer notes that while individuals have the potential to create societies in which they live, the quality of their personhood is largely dependent, both negative and positively, upon the life of the communities in which they live. Consequently, Christians should strive to create communities in which love of neighbour and mutual caring could best be realized.

In Chapters 7-8, the author outlines a social vision which holds promise for the development of human communities in which each person will be accorded dignity, justice, and freedom. This leads Kammer to reject certain Christian traditions which stress individual salvation, personal spirituality and orthodoxy above community reform, social transformation, and social justice. Also, he rejects the so-called "Christian realism" which has been hijacked by the Christian right and is used as an ideology in defense of the *status quo* when it is argued that, because of sin, the capitalist structures and policies which breed oppression and exploitation of the weaker members of society cannot really be transformed for the better. Rejecting this social pessimism, Kammer embraces liberation theology which, in his view, offers the only alternative vision which holds promise for a just, peaceful and reconciled society, thus providing real hope for human survival against our inhumanity and brutality toward each other and our planet.

Kammer's book is a balanced, lucid and readable exposition of Christian ethics, and should be read by all who care to develop a useful vision of what it is to be a good person and caring Christian community, a vision attractive enough to motivate Christians to want to transform themselves and their communities in accordance with the ethos of the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 5 discusses the liberative praxis of Jesus and its significance for the poor's struggle for liberation, as they struggle to transform unjust human society in anticipation of God's kingdom in which human struggles for justice, freedom and reconciliation shall be summed up and given their ultimate meaning and ful-fillment.

I commend this book highly for those who want to know what liberation is all about.

Cadorette, Curt: *From the Heart of the People: The Theology of Gustavo Gutier-rez.*
Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone Books, 1988. xviii + 140 pp. $14,95 (Paper); $34,95 (Hard Cover.

S.S. Maimela, Unisa, Pretoria

In this valuable publication, Cadorette makes available to the general reader an updated bibliography and exposition of the theology of one of Latin Americas' leading theologians, Gutierrez, whose name has rightly become synonymous with liberation theology.

The book, apart from its invaluable preface which discusses its author's long struggle to overcome his idealism and to come to terms with the Latin American situation, is made up of five chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the socio-economic and political context of the Peruvian situation, which is characterized by dual conflict-ing forces: oppression and liberation, exploitation and freedom, sin and salvation, and death and life. On one side there are a minority of powerful oppressors who perpetuate exploitation, domination, poverty, physical torture, pain and death. On the other side there are the poor and oppressed masses who are struggling against all odds to shake off the death-dealing chains of capitalism and class oppression.

In Chapter 2, the author discusses the negative and positive aspects of popular culture and religion as expounded by Gutierrez. He notes with deep insight that culture and religion in the hands of the dominant section of society can be lethal; they can be used to block the oppressed people's advance towards understanding their real situation and the causes of their poverty and domination. On the other hand, these cultural ideologies need not be dismissed as opium for the masses. Rather they should be critically appropriated and used by the oppressed as instru-ments to help them to understand the place of the poor in society and the mechanisms that breed and perpetuate oppression. Functioning in this positive manner, they can inspire the oppressed to act against forces that are life-denying, and to create a new social order in the place of the unjust one.

Chapter 3 discusses two Peruvian intellectuals, Arguedas and Mariategu, who have influenced Gutierrez's intellectual growth. From Arguedas, he learnt how religion can be misused and also learnt of a different God who takes the preferen-tial option for the poor in support of the poor's struggle against the forces of oppression and domination. From Mariategu, Gutierrez learnt that Marxism has positive aspects. Similarly religion can become a useful instrument in the poor people's struggle against social evils, for it announces a vision of an alternative social order which can be created in the place of the oppressive one.

In Chapter 4, Cadorette discusses the role that Marxism and social sciences play in the theology of Gutierrez. He demonstrates persuasively that Gutierrez is not a Marxist as his detractors often allege. Rather he is a creative thinker who takes the best insights from the sources he uses. Perhaps the most important contribution in this chapter is the discussion of that often misunderstood concept in liberation theology, namely, class struggle He points out how Gutierrez relates this notion to the Christian struggle for justice.